

Questions patients ask

Q: Can coffee affect fertility in men or women?

A: It is widely accepted that any effects of coffee consumption on reproductive health are linked to caffeine rather than to coffee consumption per se. The evidence to date shows that moderate caffeine intake (200-300mg/day from all sources, not simply coffee*) is unlikely to have a significant effect on fertility. Studies are inconclusive and insufficient to provide specific coffee consumption guidelines for preconception advice^{1,2}.

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

Q: Is it safe to drink coffee when pregnant?

A: Yes – the studies available from the last decade do not provide convincing evidence that moderate consumption of caffeine (200-300mg/day from all sources, not simply coffee*) increases the risk of complications during pregnancy³. However women do break down caffeine more slowly when pregnant and heavy caffeine consumers should check with their doctor or nurse whether they need to moderate their coffee intake.

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

Q: If coffee/caffeine is safe why do some research papers suggest the opposite?

A: It is important to consider the totality of the scientific evidence rather than individual studies, and, overall, well-conducted human studies have shown no adverse effects on the fetus if a pregnant woman consumes a moderate amount of caffeine (200-300mg/day from all sources, not simply coffee*).

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

Q: Why have I not wanted to drink coffee since I became pregnant?

A: Caffeine consumption tends to decrease during the early weeks of pregnancy, coinciding with increasing pregnancy symptoms which include nausea and food aversions thought to be due to high levels of pregnancy hormones.

Q: Is my baby at risk if I drink coffee during pregnancy?

A: The vast majority of scientific research published looks at the effects of caffeine in general on pregnancy, not coffee consumption per se. Those studies have found that moderate amounts of caffeine (200-300mg/day from all sources, not simply coffee*) during pregnancy do not increase the risk of congenital malformations, or birth defects in babies. It is also unlikely that moderate caffeine intake impairs fetal growth³.

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

Q: How much coffee can I safely drink during pregnancy?

A: The majority of scientific studies suggest that caffeine intake of 200-300mg/day is safe⁴. It is worth noting, however, that this amount refers to the total caffeine consumed from all sources i.e. not simply in coffee*.

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

Q: I've heard that drinking coffee during pregnancy can cause a miscarriage. Is this true?

A: A recently published review of the available science suggests that moderate caffeine consumption (200-300mg/day from all sources, not simply coffee*) is unlikely to lead to a miscarriage³. In healthy pregnancies, women experience pregnancy symptoms such as nausea and an aversion to caffeine. Research has found that women who miscarry are less prone to these symptoms and, as a result, are more likely to continue to drink coffee. However, it is likely that the lack of pregnancy symptoms is linked to the miscarriage, rather than coffee or caffeine consumption.

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

Q: Can I drink coffee when I'm breastfeeding?

A: Yes – although caffeine can be found in breast milk, it is present in very small quantities. It is safe for breastfeeding mothers to drink moderate amounts of coffee (2/3 cups per day).



Q: What are the official recommendations on caffeine consumption for pregnant women?

A: It is generally accepted that between 200-300mg/day from all sources* is safe. However the exact recommendations differ from one authority to another. The Food Standards Agency in the UK, for example, suggests that pregnant women can consume up to 200mg/day of caffeine, as does the charity March of Dimes in the USA. The American Dietetic Association, however, suggests that up to 300mg/day is safe; this is in line with the advice given by the EU Scientific Committee on Foodstuffs.

* A regular cup of coffee contains approximately 100mg of caffeine.

References

- 1 Anderson K. et al. (2010) Lifestyle factors in people seeking infertility treatment – A review. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics* 50:8-20
- 2 Hatch E. E. et al. (2012) Caffeinated beverage and soda consumption and time to pregnancy. *Epidemiology*, 23 (3); 393-401
- 3 Peck J.D. et al. (2010) A review of the epidemiologic evidence concerning the reproductive health effects of caffeine consumption: a 2000-2009 update. *Food Chemical Toxicology*, 48:2549-76
- 4 Jahanfar S. et al. (2009) Effects of restricted caffeine intake by mother on fetal, neonatal and pregnancy outcome. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 15;(2):CD006965

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